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Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly: priority theme: social integration

Statement submitted by Sisters of Charity Federation and Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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Statement

Social integration of migrants is one of the greatest challenges facing almost every government and society in the world today. Globalization increasingly requires international mobility as both developed and developing countries seek the exchange of skills and labour. The International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families can serve as a tool to promote good relations between regions, States and within societies in which migrant workers reside.

Relevant to the theme of the forty-seventh session of the Commission for Social Development "Social Integration", we find that the more than 200 million migrants are among the most vulnerable and excluded groups. They contribute significantly to the development of both host countries and countries of origin, yet they are excluded from participation at many levels.
Although migrants are frequently recruited for jobs that are difficult and dangerous, they often do not receive benefits or the rights guaranteed by labor standards. They desire inclusion but are often victims of xenophobia. Many seek legal status but encounter insurmountable obstacles. Participation in political processes and active involvement in local communities is a goal of many, but is often unattainable.

Root causes of migration

There are both positive and negative effects of globalization which impact migration. The negative effects are some of the root causes of worldwide migration patterns. A fifth of the world's population lives on less than a dollar per day and almost half of the world's population lives on less than two dollars per day. Poverty is the leading cause of migration worldwide. Many emigrants also leave their countries due to political persecution, war, economic devastation and the effects of climate change. While unregulated free trade has proven to be beneficial to wealthy corporations and countries, it has exacerbated poverty in developing countries.

Agricultural subsidies in wealthier countries benefit a few large agri-businesses at the expense of farmers in developing countries. This contributes to many people emigrating in search of a means to provide for the basic needs of their families. Multiple debt obligations have forced many developing countries to reduce social spending, prompting workers to seek funds outside of their own countries for survival and social protection needs. Another source of migration is recruitment by developing countries to fill jobs either unwanted by host country workers or where local populations cannot sufficiently supply a labor force.

Social integration applied to migrant workers

A society for all is one in which every individual, each with rights and responsibilities, has an active role to play. Such an inclusive society is promoted by social policies that seek to reduce inequality by creating flexible and tolerant societies that embrace all people.

The sixtieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights underscores that all people deserve respect of their human rights because of the inherent dignity of every human being, regardless of their relation to productive employment, their state of residence or to legal status. Article 16 of the Declaration states that "the family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the State". In host countries, respecting the integrity of the family is the primary way to assist in the integration of migrants within the community.

Social inclusion

The DESA publication, *Participatory Dialogue: Towards a Stable, Safe and Just Society for All*, states: "It is important to underline that social integration is not about attempting to 'overcome' diverse identities and collapse them all into one identity but rather about valuing the freedom to assert one's identity and achieve satisfaction and the sense of belonging, while embracing diversity."

Welcoming new members of a community can be a source of enrichment and appreciation of greater interdependence and mutual acculturation and can serve to counter the tendency of isolation and fragmentation at national levels. Women and children, often unacknowledged members of the migrant population, make significant contributions of a relational nature which could counter a legalistic, fragmented approach to dealing with newcomers.

Participation

It is a widely accepted principle for effective social development that those who are affected by decisions need to be part of the decision-making process. Planning, implementation, and evaluation by all stakeholders, including migrants and other vulnerable groups, are essential parts of the social integration process. To be deprived of participation means not having a voice and not being counted. Therefore, on the part of a host country, there is a need to address barriers such as language, cultural distinctions, educational background and access in such a way that new migrants can not only be served, but share the gifts that they bring from home.

Social integration creates the conditions for equal participation and allows migrants to share valuable knowledge gained from their life experiences. Creating a venue where local community leadership can interact with new members of the community (law enforcement, schools, clinics, churches, *inter alia*) in an open and meaningful dialogue will lead to building a better community for all.

One practical example of grass roots involvement is the following: Everyday Democracy (formerly the Study Circles Resource Center), a national organization in the United States, helps local communities find ways for diverse groups of people to think, talk and work together to solve problems. The organization works with neighborhoods, cities and towns, regions, and states across the country to help them discern how racism and ethnic differences affect the problems they address.

Everyday Democracy produces discussion guides on a number of issues to be used in the small group dialogue phase of a community change effort (available from www.everyday-democracy.org).

Recommendations:

1. That all member states sign and ratify The International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families.

2. That governments and the Bretton Woods Institutions give greater attention to addressing the inequalities caused by realities such as free trade agreements, agricultural subsidies, debt, climate change, as well as national, regional, and international conflicts.

3. That all sectors of society, governments and civil entities acknowledge their responsibility to facilitate social integration.

4. That nations honor their Official Development Assistance commitments in order to reach the Millennium Development Goals which will help to alleviate poverty as the leading cause of migration.

5. That governments create legislation that fosters the protection of family unity among migrants.

6. That stakeholders utilize material already available, such as DESA's work on *Participatory Dialogue: Towards a Stable, Safe and Just Society for All,* to prepare themselves for social integration, especially as it relates to migrants.

That stakeholders at all levels utilize mechanisms to evaluate social integration with migrant populations, such as the European Union social indicators, and adapt them to the needs of their own countries.

Note:

Statement endorsed by the following non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council: American International Women's Association, Congregation of Our Lady of charity of the Good Shepherd, Congregations of St. Joseph, Greek Orthodox Archdiocesan Council of North and South America, International Association of Schools of Social Work, International Federation of Business and Professional Women, International Presentation Association of the Sisters of the Presentation, UNANIMA International and World Christian Life Community.